



# HIGHER EDUCATION BEYOND ACADEMICS: EDUCATION PLUS

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## ABSTRACT

People from all ages and backgrounds have decided to enter higher education, and for a variety of reasons. Although the decision to enter higher education is a very individual one, but many students enter university to experience the lifestyle or meeting new people. University is about more than what is taught within the walls of a classroom. It is about getting involved and becoming a part of campus life. From joining a student organization to volunteering in the community, leadership skills are a necessity. The personal development and growth that a student experiences will make him/her more organized, confident, and capable of handling the responsibilities of college and career. He will greatly enhance his ability to work in a more effective and efficient manner with a broader scope of people.

With the diverse population of students in universities today, educators must strive to create a system that reflects and celebrates diversity and allows the students to reach high standards. Educators can create new paths to learning standards by providing more learning options for students. Preparing for life with a scientific frame of mind is more essential than preparing for examination. For a country to grow meaningfully and in a sustainable way, the university systems and colleges have to become centers of excellence where the best minds apply themselves to the task of molding India's coming generation. Education today is an enterprise of universal dimensions, huge and far reaching, and the aims have universal application. Courses in value education need to be conducted for students, teachers and administrators, so as to ensure a value-imbibing atmosphere in the whole campus.

This qualitative paper highlights the importance of character building higher education which is missing in our colleges and universities and higher education institutions.

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education, Education Plus, Personality Development.

Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru (1947) in his convocation address to the University of Allahabad summed up the basic objectives of the university and its role in national life: *'A University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people.'* Nehru highlighted the basic truth that the universities have a crucial part to play in the life, welfare and strength of a nation. Their principal object is to deepen man's understanding of the universe and of himself: in body, mind and spirit, to disseminate this understanding throughout society and to apply it in the service of mankind.

### Aims of Higher Education beyond Academics:

#### Why join a University?:

A student often thinks, 'why go to a University - what can it offer me?' People from all ages and backgrounds have decided to enter higher education, and for a variety of reasons. Although the decision to enter higher education is a very individual one, but many students enter university to experience the lifestyle or meeting new people. University is about more than what is taught within the walls of a classroom. It is about getting involved and becoming a part of campus life. From joining a student organization to volunteering in the community, leadership skills are a necessity. The personal development and growth that a student experiences will make him/her more organized, confident, and capable of handling the responsibilities of college and career. He will greatly enhance his ability to work in a more effective and efficient manner with a broader scope of people.

Institutions may be created by individuals but the creators cannot regulate its growth as the institutions get their own life and they proceed according to that. All that one can do from outside is to try and have such people as can give the correct guidance. By guidance is meant not forcing any ideology or restricting the conduct in particular way. Guidance is to see how the personality of the individual is allowed to grow in its own way.

Whether it is one mile away or a thousand miles away, going to a university can be a very exciting yet anxious time, especially for first-year students. Unfortunately, experience has taught us that many first-year students do not realize that going away to college requires a shedding of skin or a transformation from their previous high school mentality and lifestyle. The situations and decision-making that students experience in college, whether academic or personal, are often radically different than the circumstances they experienced in high school—making it safe to conclude that a first-year student is still in the mindset of a high school student.

Often college students focus so much on academics that they neglect other psychosocial aspects of their lives. These aspects include social relationships (significant others, parents, and friends), environment (students are not conscious that they need time to adapt to a new environment), physical health (stu-

dents often do not exercise or practice relaxation to help relieve their academic stress and frustrations), and religion and spirituality (students may not focus on gaining support from their pastor, minister, or place of worship). If students are able to also focus on these areas, they will find that they are able to manage their academic responsibilities more effectively.

### Need of the Day: Education beyond Academics:

It's not enough to keep saying our goal is "academic excellence," as though that means something sufficiently neutral and obvious to everyone. We need to replace the word "academic" with new words for what we're after—with language that carries a different set of connotations. If habits of mind are the goal, then things other than the academic disciplines themselves can serve as subject matter. Working towards a higher education qualification is the ultimate goal for any undergraduate. But university life is not just about studying. Meeting new people and enhancing your social and recreational opportunities are also part of the student experience.<sup>1</sup>

A high quality of life for students is a clear demonstration of our commitment to educational opportunity. Many factors impact the quality of student life. An excellent library, state-of-the-art information technology, appropriate laboratories and classrooms all affect the academic dimension of student life. One of the chief determinants of the quality of student life is the degree of interaction between faculty and students. Communion of faculty and students is the core of learning. Skilled teachers intensify learning by providing authentic instruction and meaningful assignments while holding high expectations for all students. Such assignments deal with the significant concepts of a discipline, incorporate higher-order thinking skills, are connected to the "real world," and allow substantial time for discussion and idea sharing among students (Peterson, 1995).

With the diverse population of students in universities today, educators must strive to create a system that reflects and celebrates diversity and allows the students to reach high standards. Educators can create new paths to learning standards by providing more learning options for students.

### Personality Development: University's primary function:

Our first cause, that without which all others lose purpose, is the student. Our culture should value, above all else, the students and the educational opportunities afforded them, especially through excellence in teaching. Our need to be responsive to changing realities as well as the need for interdisciplinary work to solve complex problems leads to new thinking about curricula. Curricula must be in tune with the forces at work in the world, the needs of students, and the expert understanding of faculty. The changes required may force us to rethink the nature of degree programs and to balance disciplinary traditions with other forces. We should aim to provide a university climate that is learner-centered; emphasizes academic rigor and high expectations of students, faculty, and staff; encourages involvement in the life of the institution beyond the classroom; fosters an envi-

onment of caring and concern; and promotes success and leadership development for all students.

Rabindranath Tagore on the establishment of Vishva Bharati University at Shanti Niketan in early 20's wanted to link education with nature and emphasized on development of personality of an individual in totality. If we study the political systems of the developing countries, we observe that these countries have all types of governances, such as democracy, communism, monarchy and military. But in all these countries we observe the same kind of problems: poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, diseases and crimes. Hence, it is clear that only mental empowering can change the society and the world and not the system of governance. Human beings possess four dimensions of power: physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual. Good quality higher education must empower a person in all the four dimensions. With this backdrop, Swami Vivekananda said:

*"We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet."*

Understanding and acceptance of oneself is the first important principle and prerequisite for understanding the universe as a whole. Experience has shown that human resources are the most valuable assets of any profession. It is more valuable than capital or equipment. Unfortunately, it is also the most wasted. People can be the biggest asset or the biggest liability. It is the need of the hour to build up people with character, integrity, good values and a positive attitude. Any and every University today emphasizes numerous programs, mostly academic, but these will work only when we have the right foundation.

According to Dr. William James of Harvard University, the greatest discovery of this generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind. Most of our attitude is established during our formative years. It is the responsibility of the universities to suitably mould the attitudes of the students so that the quality of the society is improved. Surprisingly, almost 100% of money in education go to teach facts and figures which account for only 15% of success in work. Knowledge strategically applied translates into wisdom, ensuring success. We are drowning in information but starving for knowledge and wisdom. Education, especially higher education ought to teach the youths not only how to make a living but also how to live. For holistic personality development, apart from academics all these are needed: Sports, Education in Human values, yoga, meditation, NSS, and NCC, etc.

Learning is acquiring necessary knowledge and skill for better performance. A commission appointed by UNESCO<sup>2</sup> has recommended four pillars of learning.

1. Learning to know
2. Learning to do
3. Learning to be
4. Learning to live together

Learning is at the central core of an educational system. The quality of the society is enhanced when the quality of the individuals is enhanced. Universities as they presently do, place more emphasis on the first two pillars of learning. Unless the university system strengthens the last two pillars of learning, the learning society system becomes unstable.

The Universities should strengthen the following desirable attributes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners so that the 21<sup>st</sup> century society is enriched:

1. A positive attitude in life
2. Learnability: learning to learn, on one's own
3. Zeal for life-long learning
4. Communication skills
5. Ability to get knowledge from other disciplines
6. Ability to work in a team
7. Creative skills
8. Integrative skills
9. International outlook
10. Ability to employ information technology

Preparing for life with a scientific frame of mind is more essential than preparing for examination. For a country to grow meaningfully and in a sustainable way, the university systems and colleges have to become centers of excellence where the best minds apply themselves to the task of moulding India's coming generation.

#### Mental Health and Hygiene for University Students:

The term 'mental health problems' is one that encompasses a range of experiences and situations. Mental health might usefully be viewed as a continuum of experience, from mental well-being through to a severe and enduring mental ill-

ness. We all experience changes in our mental health state influenced by social, personal, financial and other factors. Major life events such as a close bereavement, or leaving home, can impact significantly on how we feel about ourselves, for example, leading to depression and anxiety. Our mental well-being is an issue for all of us to consider all of the time, as we might consider our physical well-being. Given support and information people experiencing mental health problems can make positive changes and improvements.

An increasing number of students at University are experiencing mental health problems that impact not only on their academic work, but also on all other aspects of their University life. Mental health problems not only have implications for the student involved, but often also for those around them: friends, colleagues, staff and family. Generally the university boys and girls today lack mental peace because of the following psychological problems for which they need guidance and support:

1. Feeling of insecurity as a result of unemployment
2. Stress, anxiety and hypertension
3. Aggression, frustration and alienation

Students have an increasing need for psychological services and related resources, hence there is an urgency of expansion of these services. Such services include providing information about what mental health problems are, how to recognize when someone is struggling with them, and the range of support services within the University that can provide consultation, advice and more direct involvement to best support the student and those around them. The University-community interaction in health sector is very crucial. The community people particularly youth and women are in reproductive and productive age group, could be mobilized through health and educational intervention. Health issues particularly adolescent-health and reproductive health are their immediate concern. They need behavioral change communication on population and Health issues.

The UGC under its policy frame of X<sup>th</sup> Plan<sup>3</sup> has recognized university based and the community based counseling services. Under the community based as peer educators and after their proper financing and orientation, they visit the community and provide the following services:

1. Proper Information and Communication on Food Nutrition
2. Adolescent physical, social and mental growth
3. Health needs of the girl child, street children and the marginalized children
4. Counseling on family welfare issues and on life skills issues
5. Counseling on pre and post test HIV AIDS counseling

A review of some of the researches conducted abroad has emphasized the need and importance of mental health services in schools, colleges and universities. A study conducted in University of Michigan by Megivern, Mary Deborah (2001) on Educational functioning and college integration of students with mental illness: Examining the roles of psychiatric symptomatology and Mental Health service use showed that college students with Mental illness were capable of academic performance equivalent to that of students without mental health problems. However, the academic and social aspects of college were taxing for these students, particularly if they were not receiving effective mental health services. Results indicated the need for better processes for assisting students experiencing serious symptoms on campus. Suggestions included a better referral system and improved coordination between Higher Education Mental health resources and the community based mental health system.<sup>4</sup>

Wagner and Kari Lynn in Spalding University conducted another study "A program evaluation model for the mental health counseling component of the Youth services centers within Jefferson County, Louisville, Kentucky" in the year 2002. The underlying conceptualization for the evaluation based upon a review of the literature, was that school based Mental Health counselors provide a social support to at-risk students, thereby increasing the students' ability to deal with life stressors resulting in an increased capacity for academic achievement.<sup>5</sup>

Another study "An analysis of differences between successful and unsuccessful high risk university students" by Janet in the University of Memphis in 1995, emphasized the need for careful monitoring of students with regard to their study habits, attributions for success, participation in on-campus activities because these factors seem to impact academic success. It has long been the primary purpose of the remedial and developmental programmes in Higher Education to increase the probability of academic success for high-risk students.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it is established that there is an urgent need to provide mental health services in every university institution to help the young girls and boys to develop an attitude- a positive attitude that contributes to 85% of success in an individual's life. It will help them develop numerous skills and will contribute in providing them sufficient knowledge and skill to deal with the stressors in life.

**Counseling and Psychological support in the University campus:**

In the yester years, educational counseling was not seen as an activity independent of 'Teaching', since, the job markets were directly dependent on the degrees bestowed upon by the universities. However, the current situation has drastically shifted from this traditional scenario. Today the monopoly of universities to offer degrees as license for jobs is challenged by the plurality of recognized institutions in the society, which are need based and skill oriented. In the knowledge society of today, techno-aided learning has considerably changed the face of both learning and market requirements. Hence, the requirement of the position of an educational counselor is felt in the Universities, where, 'knowledge learning' and 'market driven job' needs, will have to melt to match and create a web for those who would like to seek an opportunity to work or continue education. However, assisting with the details must also include the crucial task of helping students to address the psychosocial issues that they encounter.

**Stress Management Training for Youth:**

This is an emerging area where all universities should give urgent attention. Today the youths are the most intolerant and frustrated group of our society. The young boys and girls are working and living under great pressures to cope up with the demands of the competitive world. Its important that they are trained in stress management skills so that they are capable to handle stress in various walks of their lives. Year after year our universities are producing thousands of degree and diploma holders. But the job market has very little hopes to share. Many more thousands are being added to the millions of frustrated jobless youth. It is high time for the university to take effective strategy to foresee danger and handle the crisis failing which; our country will have to feed a bunch of mentally unfit youth in the coming years. The youth while they are in universities should be trained to prepare themselves to face the crises in the job market and overcome it eventually.

**Personal Growth and Satisfaction:**

Studying at a higher education level should offer student new challenges and goals. Whether these challenges involve independent living, juggling with family or a work commitment, or grasping new ideas and concepts, is obviously a very individual issue.

For many students, the higher education experience has bought about a greater feeling of independence, self-discipline and growing confidence. Others have described the experience as one of personal growth and satisfaction. For most, it is about realizing one's full potential. In an international study of University students one of the students described:

*"... I came to university with the intention of gaining a more general feeling of self-worth and advancement, and I have certainly found that I am more confident in terms of things like communication, organization and time-management."*

A typical college student has some, but not a lot, of free time. Most students want to use this time to relax and have fun. What they soon realize is that leisure activities can help develop intellectual and social skills that serve them well in careers and graduate programs. Students often report that their spare time activities have provided important experience and sharpened a number of skills, including: Leadership, Cultural understanding, Administration, Human relations, public speaking, writing, teaching, research, management, public relations, advertising, sales promotion, political communication, social service and public service.

**Developing Skills and Subject Knowledge:**

Along with acquiring specialized subject knowledge, undergraduates should also be helped to develop and enhance other skills - perhaps this entails essay and report writing, study skills, time management skills, or information gathering. Without a doubt, talent and above-average skills are what matters in today's knowledge-based economy. In a knowledge-based economy, only those with highest-skills advance and make progress in life. Thurow says:

*"What is widening is not so much the wage gap between the averagely-skilled and the unskilled...but the gap between the averagely-skilled and the very skilled."*

Graduates follow a wide range of career paths and many may enter higher education with a clear view of the path they wish to follow. But for those who are unsure, or decide to change direction, the University should have a Career department to help the student to develop and plan his/her career, and give practical advice. The department should provide a wide range of advice, services and information for students, which will give an insight into the different career options that are open to graduates.

**Changing perspective of Higher Education**

We have been consumed recently by internally derived changes in the structure and function of higher education. In particular the old conception of a university-essentially that of an ivory tower separate from society at large and therefore not contaminated by pressures of everyday life, is now virtually dead. University education is no longer funded publicly as an end in itself. Rather it is funded for more ulterior, even utilitarian purposes. In other words higher education is a means

rather than an end. While universities remain dependent upon the public purse this is inevitable, but this also implies a degree of flexibility to change in relation to externally defined goals, which universities have felt it uncomfortable to come to terms with. It is the promotion of lifelong learning along with the complete growth of the student- it implies a set of qualitative and not just quantitative changes in the nature of teaching and learning.

**Any and every University should:**

- Set high-quality admission standards and increase consideration of leadership and other dimensions of the whole student.
- Nurture the individual student to insure highest probability of success. We must assume responsibility for the success of our students.
- Increase opportunities for all students to develop the academic and social connections that facilitate academic success and involvement in the life of the institution. Bring students and faculty into more frequent and productive interaction. Double the number of small classes for undergraduates.
- All students should have readily available opportunities for academic enrichment experiences appropriate to their educational goals. Develop a systematic approach and infrastructure to facilitate opportunities for all students to have enrichment experiences, such as expanded honors courses, study-abroad experiences, interdisciplinary curricula, supplemental instruction, internships, cooperative education, and research opportunities.
- Continually evaluate and adjust academic offerings and curricula to keep them relevant and strong.

Guidance and counseling has to be made an integral part of higher education to make it meaningful and purposeful for the students. A programme, if it is to make its impact felt on the growth and development of students and enhance the quantity and improve the quality of the educational programme as a whole, there needs to be set up a well organized structure covering the three major functions of the programme viz, adjustment, orientational and developmental. It is desirable that the upcoming universities and institutes build this provision into their organizational structure at the planning stage itself and the old universities suitably add this provision into their educational programme so that the students may avail of this service easily and profitably.

**Personality Development Cell:**

There is an urgent need today to establish a Personality Development Cell in every university to deal exclusively with the psychological and personal issues of the students and to train them in numerous skills viz communication skills, public speaking skills, developing confidence, increased memory and concentration power and problem solving ability, goal setting and time management skills. Universities must plan out some practical training programmes to develop new enthusiasm in youths for work, responsibility and living. Such programmes will help them overcome fear and timidity and will enhance their ability to express ideas and feelings effectively.

Education today is an enterprise of universal dimensions, huge and far reaching, and the aims have universal application. Education for individual excellence and for nation- building is missed in many of the colleges, which under a mistaken definition of secularism do not even offer a prayer at the beginning of the day's work. Courses in value education need to be conducted for students, teachers and administrators, so as to ensure a value-imbibing atmosphere in the whole campus. As Swami Vivekananda has said, institutions of higher education are meant for man-making and character-building and unless such a mission is undertaken in all seriousness by higher educational institutions, the nation and the world would continue to be destroyed by violence and other evils (S.Laxmi).

Beyond their traditional academic role the Universities should aspire to achieve the goal of value education by the following: sensitizing about values to the prospective teachers and varied workforce produced by the universities, reforms in school curricula for value education, development of knowledge and research base for value education, collaborations and liaison with other national and international institutions and academia engaged in work in this field.

**Campus placement cell:**

Institutes and colleges of professional courses e.g. MBA, B.Tech, MBBS, and Law etc offer job placement facilities for their final year students. They have an independent campus placement cell headed by a professor. Universities should also cater to the job requirements of their pass outs and should run such placement cells with a clearly specified vision and programme. Such cells should keep on studying the current trends and requirements in the occupational world and try to prepare the universities pass outs for the jobs they are suited for. The Cell should also provide occupational information, training for the interview, conduct of mock interviews and training for effective presentation.

**Counseling Cell:**

Even though the area of academic advising is limited to academics, it is important for advisers to attend to psychosocial issues that may affect students' academic performance and to educate students about these issues. Once students are



informed, they have a better understanding of how to improve their academic performance, especially if it means benefiting from personal counseling at the college's counseling center. They are then better able to make informed choices. Every University and a large college should have a counseling center headed by a trained professional counseling officer who should be a Ph.D or possess Master's Degree in Psychology and Counseling, with considerable counseling experience. The Center should be situated at a convenient place so as to facilitate the provisions of counseling services for the whole university community and the colleges in the immediate vicinity. The faculty members can refer students to it and students too would like to visit it to get help in their problems and anxieties. The center should discharge the following functions:

- Give assistance to individuals and small groups of students and staff members with special educational, vocational and personal problems
- Give assistance to the university in developing, advising and counseling programmes and consultation on special psychological problems
- Provide psychological testing facilities for the university both for individuals and groups
- It would be ideal if the Counseling Center includes special clinics and laboratories for speech and hearing problems, study skills and reading improvement.

#### The Organizational set-up:

A Guidance and Counseling Committee under the Chairmanship of the Vice Chancellor should be statutorily established in the University to look after the youths' higher education beyond academics. The Personality Development Cell, Placement Cell and Counseling Cell of the University should function under this Guidance and Counseling Committee in which at least one representative of each of the following should represent as a member: The University Employment Information and Guidance Bureau (UEIGB), Dean of Students, Heads of Departments of Psychology, Education and Management, In charges of Personality Development Cell, Campus Placement Cell, and Counseling Cell, Academic Advisor of Student Advisory Bureau (SAB). If the number of students exceeds 1000, assistant counseling officers may be appointed. One assistant counseling officer may be had for every 100 students.

An effective guidance and counseling programme staffed with adequate qualified personnel and equipped with adequate tools does cost money. Studies do suggest that potentially an effective programme of guidance can make significant contribution to student development. The real question, therefore, may not be "can the college or university or even the state afford guidance"? But rather, "can the college or university or state afford not to have guidance?" It should be apparent that it is not the question whether the facility of guidance and counseling for college and university student should be provided or not, but only a question of how soon and how sound!

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